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School Librarianship: Career Choice and Recruitment

Donna M. Shannon

Recruitment to librarianship has been a recurring topic in the professional literature with the prediction of shortages as baby boomers begin to retire in large numbers. This article reports results from surveys conducted to gather information on reasons for choosing school librarianship as a career path and how employers go about recruiting school library media specialists (SLMSs) to their schools and school districts. As part of a survey of University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science program completers, respondents explained reasons for becoming a SLMS. Focus group interviews with current students and recent graduates were also conducted. Three South Carolina employer groups (school district media supervisors, human resource directors, and school principals) were surveyed to determine how they recruit SLMSs. Results will inform recruitment efforts of LIS programs, professional organizations, and school districts.

Introduction and Background

A wave of retirements among the nation's librarians is expected to occur between 2010 and 2020. Given graduation rates reported by library and information science (LIS) programs accredited by the American Library Association (ALA), this could result in a deficit of LIS professionals.¹ According to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, three in five of the nation's librarians are 45 years of age or older.² In recent years, recruitment to the profession has been a recurrent theme in the professional literature and the focus of a number of initiatives created to address the problem. Then ALA President John Berry appointed a Recruitment and Diversity Task Force in 2002 and in 2004 ALA President-Elect Michael Gorman announced that his presidential year would focus on library education and recruitment of librarians from diverse ethnic and cultural groups.³ In 2001 American Association of School Librarians (AASL) President Helen Adams appointed the AASL Task Force on Recruitment for the Profession and in 2002 First Lady and former school librarian Laura Bush announced the "Recruiting and Educating Librarians for the 21st Century" program. At the 2005 ALA midwinter conference, the ALA Recruitment Assembly sponsored a day-long forum to share information and ideas for recruiting "high quality people from diverse backgrounds to library careers."⁴ Re-

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cruiting young librarians to school librarianship emerged as a top concern of school library leaders who attended the 2006 *School Library Journal* Summit in Chicago.⁵

Most studies of librarians' career choice and recruitment conducted over the past few decades have solicited perspectives of library school students through surveys carried out in library school settings.⁶ More recently, researchers using Web-based surveys have sought participation of library workers identified through mass mailings to electronic discussion forums.⁷ Results of these studies have revealed some consistent patterns. The nature of library work is often given as a reason for choosing librarianship as a career path. Many respondents mention gratification in helping people find information, a love for books and reading, or that they like "library work" and believe that it makes a difference in users' lives. Prior work in a library setting and personal contact with a librarian are both significant motivators for those who enroll in library school. None of these studies, however, focused specifically on preservice or practicing school library media specialists (SLMSs).

Findings from an AASL Recruitment Task Force survey conducted in 2002 cited the following reasons for a predicted shortage of SLMSs: (1) retirements, (2) limited access to library education, (3) poor teaching conditions, (4) low pay, (5) negative stereotypes of librarians, and (6) no job security.⁸ The impact of each of these explanations varies from state to state depending on a number of factors. In some states (such as South Carolina) SLMSs are required in all but the smallest schools which translates into more job security. But other states report funding shortfalls that have resulted in elimination of some jobs as well as closure of library media centers.⁹ Today there are more distance education opportunities (including online programs) available than there were when the 2002 survey was conducted. Low pay may not be a factor for experienced classroom teachers who are looking for a change of jobs within the field of education. But, many states (especially those where credentialed SLMSs are required) will face shortages as baby-boomers retire. In South Carolina, SLMSs have been on the Department of Education's "critical needs" list for several years.

In order to develop recruitment strategies and design preparation programs, understanding the reasons why individuals choose school librarianship as a career path is important to employers, professional associations, and library educators. Likewise, information from employers about their strategies for filling SLMS positions will help job seekers as they seek em-

ployment. Their perspectives may also reveal gaps in communication between employers and those who can help with recruitment and placement of SLMSs such as professional organizations and LIS education programs.

The research reported here focuses on reasons SLMSs gave for pursuing school librarianship as a career path and strategies used by employers to recruit school librarians. The purposes of the study were to explore: (1) the motivation for choosing school librarianship as a career path, (2) strategies that schools and school districts use to recruit SLMSs, and (3) the implications this information has for recruitment practices and for library education programs. Two groups were studied to address the challenge of attracting SLMSs to the profession: school library media preparation program completers and employers of SLMSs. Data were collected by way of online surveys of individuals who completed school media certification requirements at the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science (USC-SLIS), South Carolina school district human resource directors, district level school media coordinators, and school principals. In addition, a group of current students joined a group of relatively recent program completers in two focus group interviews to discuss their choice of school librarianship as a career path and to offer suggestions for recruitment.

Research Questions

- What are the reasons SLMSs give for choosing a career in school librarianship? Are there differences for those with classroom teaching experience and those without experience as classroom teachers?
- What strategies do employers use to recruit SLMSs to their schools and school districts?
- What are the implications of career choice and employer recruitment strategies for recruitment plans and library education programs?

Method

The data used to address the first research question came from responses to open-ended questions included in a survey of students who completed the school media certification program at USC-SLIS from 1997 through 2003 and data from focus group interviews of two groups of program completers and current students. To answer the second question, South Carolina employers (school district level media coordinators, district level human resource directors, and school principals) were surveyed. Individuals in each of these groups are involved in recruiting SLMSs to their schools and school districts. Surveys were created in Flashlight Online, a Web-based service for creating, administering, and analyzing surveys housed at Washington State University. USC has a contractual agreement with Flashlight Online that gives faculty and staff unlimited access to this service. Data analysis is described below.

Who Responded?

Program Completers

Students who completed the USC-SLIS school media certification program between 1997 and 2003 and whose current email address could be located (275 of a possible 299) were emailed information about and a link to the online survey. In all, 174 program completers submitted useable surveys. Of those, 143 (82.18%) reported that they were working as a SLMS (74 in elementary schools, 23 in middle schools, 33 in high schools, and 13 in other types of schools). Of the 174 respondents, 48 (27.59%) did not have classroom teaching experience prior to enrolling in the USC-SLIS program; 126 (72.41%) reported that they had teaching experience or had been trained as a classroom teacher before seeking certification as a SLMS.

Other characteristics of program completer respondents:

- Of the thirty-one who were not working as a library media specialist at the time they completed the survey, only three reported that they had been unable to find a position. Ten were working in other jobs in the field of education.
- Six respondents were African-Americans, 168 were white, not of Hispanic origin.
- Only nine of the 174 respondents were males.
- The average age of respondents at the time they began the USC school media preparation program was 34.4.

Employers

Participation was solicited from three employer groups:

1. Fifty-two district level personnel designated as the contact person for school library media programs and active in their support of these programs in their districts were emailed information about and a link to the survey.
2. District level human resource directors were asked to participate via an email message forwarded to their statewide electronic discussion list by the owner of the list. The message included a link to the survey.
3. Building level principals were contacted through the South Carolina Association of School Administrators. Members with an email address in the Association's database received an email message with a link to the survey.

The number of responses from each employer group is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Employer Groups Surveyed.

Participants	# in target population	# of useable surveys completed
District level supervisors	52	27 (52%)
District level human resource directors	70	34 (48.6%)
School principals	785	189 (24.08%)

Findings

First, findings related to choice of school librarianship as a career path are presented followed by results related to how school librarians are being recruited by schools and school districts. Finally, suggestions for recruitment offered by program completers and current students without classroom teaching experience during focus group interviews are described.

Reasons for Choosing School Librarianship as a Career Path

To learn more about how individuals decide on a career in school librarianship, open-ended questions in a survey of USC-SLIS program completers asked explicitly about their motivation for pursuing school media certification. Of the 174 respondents, 123 who were classroom teachers before qualifying for school media certification and 47 non-teachers answered these questions. Responses from the two groups were analyzed separately using methods appropriate for qualitative data. Comments were printed out, read and reread, coded, and sorted into categories based on themes that emerged from each of the two groups. The data were examined again to determine similarities and differences between the responses of each group.

Comments from Respondents with Classroom Teaching Experience

Of the 123 respondents with experience as classroom teachers, twenty straightforwardly stated that they pursued school librarianship because were looking for a way out of the classroom. Many also added that they did not want to leave the field of education.

- "I wanted to stay in education but wanted a different kind of degree that would allow me to leave the classroom."
- "I was becoming burned out as a classroom teacher and was looking for a change without leaving education."

Another group of respondents put a slightly more positive spin on their decision, describing the position of SLMS as one that would open up more "possibilities," "options," or "alternatives" for their work in education. Those who did not specifically refer to leaving the classroom focused on areas of interest to them, such as the desire to work with children and/or students, love of books and reading, or an interest in technology:

- "I love the challenge of learning the new technology and integrating it into the classroom. Also love the idea of being able to share good literature with children. The combination is unbeatable!"
- "I was very interested in technology and information literacy. I became interested in this as emerging technology was introduced in the school where I was teaching vocational students."

Some responses focused on the variety in the work of the SLMS:

- “After fifteen years in the classroom, I wanted to work with students on a broader range of subjects.”
- “I also wanted to collaborate with teachers of various disciplines and help them create lesson plans.”
- “I was interested in promoting reading in a program that affected students at many different abilities, grade levels, and with many different interests.”

Comments from Respondents without Classroom Teaching Experience

There were fewer negative comments from the 47 respondents who did not have experience as classroom teachers, although two said that they were interested in the field of education but did not want to work as a classroom teacher:

- “Though I thought I wanted to be involved in schools I knew I didn’t want to be a classroom teacher.”
- “I love kids and I wanted to teach, but did not want to be a classroom teacher.”

Others explained that they wanted a career in the field of education:

- “I wanted to work in the education field and school library media interested me because the position reaches all the students in a school.”
- “I have always been drawn to the field of education.”
- “I wanted to be a classroom teacher but the only options for me at the time were to get another undergraduate degree in education or do the MAT program. Neither of these was feasible with being a mother of young children. I thought this was a good option if I was not going to be a classroom teacher.”

A higher proportion of non-teachers (40.43%) mentioned their love of children or their desire to work with students than did the teacher respondents (17.07%). Perhaps it is “taken for granted” on the part of teachers. Typical responses from non-teachers:

- “It is a career in which I can make a difference in the lives of children.”
- “I love children’s literature and I love working with children. A school library media specialist job seemed the perfect way to combine those two loves.”

Common Reasons

Employability and schedule were reasons cited by both teacher and non-teacher respondents for pursuing this career path. Because SLMSs are required in most South Carolina schools and are on the state’s “critical needs” list, some respondents believed there would be favorable job prospects and job security. Others mentioned the “family friendly” nature of the

school calendar, and a few mentioned the fact that they might one day like to work in another type of library. The following were typical responses:

- "I was very aware that there was a shortage of media specialists."
- "Prefer the school schedule—summers off, no weekends/nights—as opposed to a public library schedule."
- "To allow myself the flexibility to work at a public library or a K–12 school."

Personal contacts or experience with libraries or librarians were important for both those with classroom teaching experience and those without such experience. For those with teaching experience, interaction with the SLMS at their school was mentioned most often. This took the form of a recommendation or encouragement from that person, but for others it was the positive influence of a SLMS with whom the respondent had worked:

- "I spent a lot of time as a teacher working with my media specialists. They were a great help to me and showed me what an asset to the teacher a great media specialist could be."
- "I taught at the elementary school level since 1985 and had been in a school where we had a wonderful library media specialist."
- "I saw the joy that the media specialists had at the school where I was teaching and I wanted that same joy in supporting others in education."

Based on experience with SLMSs who were perceived to be ineffective, some respondents were inspired to provide a better program:

- "I was not satisfied with the library programs at the schools I had been teaching and thought I would enjoy it and do a better job."
- "The retirement of our media specialist who did not encourage students or collaborate with teachers led me to discuss changes with my principal who suggested that I get certification and make the changes."
- "I was a classroom teacher in a school with a librarian who was sub-par (to put it nicely). I found myself thinking how I would do things if I were in the job and realized it was what I really wanted to do."

Among those new to education, most had some kind of exposure to librarians or libraries. Eleven of the forty-seven non-teachers who responded to this open-ended question had either worked or volunteered in a library:

- "I was working as a library assistant and realized that I could do the media specialist's job if I went back to school."
- "I was a volunteer at my son's school in the media center and observed the media specialist at her job for four months. I decided I could do her job since I really liked working with the students."
- "I worked as a substitute in a public library. I liked the library environment and decided since I wanted to switch careers, I'd go for a library degree."

Examples of other personal contacts from the non-teacher group:

- "My father was a school superintendent and encouraged me to look into school media."
- "I started an MAT program at XXXX, hoping to discover some "school" field that would fit. In my first class a librarian gave us an orientation and I was amazed at what had happened since my undergrad years and was hooked."
- "Originally I was working on a master's degree in political science but was unhappy with this choice. I ran into a student with whom I had gone to college and she talked about how much she was enjoying library school and all of the opportunities there were in the field. I called SLIS and made an appointment to talk with the dean. I decided after that meeting to change from political science to library science."

Focus Group Interviews

How classroom teachers choose to become a SLMS is better understood than how non-teachers select the job. To understand more about how non-teachers discover school librarianship as a possible career and what motivates them to pursue this path, two focus group interviews were held. Fourteen women representing a mix of current students and program completers, who did not have classroom teaching experience, participated in one of the two focus group interviews each lasting about 90 minutes. Three of the fourteen participated by telephone in a conference call arrangement. These sessions were held to clarify, triangulate, and build on program completer survey results. There were two overarching purposes of these interviews: (1) to determine how and when participants became aware of school librarianship as a career path and why they chose it and (2) to gather their ideas for recruiting potential students like themselves to school librarianship. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 47. Their average age was just over 35. Nine were students near the end of the MLIS program and pursuing school media certification; five were relatively recent graduates (between two months and three years) at the time of the interviews. Two were African-American and twelve were white. One current student entered the MLIS program directly from her undergraduate program and another held a Ph.D. in science and was working as a biologist at the time of the interview. The others came from a variety of vocational backgrounds including bookstore workers, a chemistry lab worker, a fundraiser, a graphic designer, a technical writer, a teacher's aide, and a former health care educator.

A digital voice recorder (with cassette tape recorder backup) was used to record interviews. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, printed out, read and reread. Data were coded, categorized, and organized based on concepts and themes that emerged as part of the analysis phase of the research.

School Librarianship as a Career Path

Participants were asked to explain how and when they discovered school librarianship as a possible career path and why they decided to pursue it.

Concepts that emerged from analysis of their responses clustered around three themes: "The personal," "the practical," and "the passion." "The personal" and "the practical" parallel the findings from the program completer survey.

"The Personal"

Personal contacts accounted for how twelve of the fourteen focus group participants became aware of school librarianship as a possible career. Most often the personal contact was a librarian, including friends, relatives, co-workers, neighbors, or librarians in schools their children attended. One young lady entered the program directly from her undergraduate work where an advisor suggested librarianship as a possible career. Three had bookstore experience.

- "I was the Ways and Means chairman for my daughter's school PTA and I came into contact with the media specialist there and I really got working with her."
- "I first clued in to the library thing when my neighbor across the street, who has an M.Ed. from XXXX university with a specialization in school libraries mentioned it."
- "I have a friend who is a media specialist at XXXX high school."

"The Practical"

Much like the responses from program completers who responded to the open-ended questions in the survey described above, several focus group participants offered practical considerations for pursuing school librarianship as a career path. Nine of the fourteen were mothers with school-aged children; three of the remaining five were young women who mentioned their plans for starting a family. Several pointed out that having the same schedule as their children impacted their decision to pursue this career path. Spending evenings and summers with their children was important to them. Three of the participants were married to teachers and looked forward to spending summers with their spouses. Individuals in South Carolina who pursue teacher certification in one of the "critical needs" areas are eligible for a very attractive "career changer" loan. This was a factor for some of the focus group participants. Although lack of job stability is an often-cited reason for a shortage of individuals interested in librarianship as a career, a few of these women mentioned "stability" or "job security" as factors that positively influenced their decision to pursue certification as a SLMS. This might not be the case in states where certified SLMSs are not required in every school as they are in South Carolina.

- "What motivated me to the school library, I have to be honest, was money. Because I could get a teacher loan and work it off in 3 years. I'll be honest."

- “But the one thing that really motivated me was the fact that I had one child and we knew we wanted to have another and I really wanted to be on their schedule.”
- “And also the idea of coordinating schedules . . . my husband is a teacher . . .”
- “Whenever we decide to have children I look forward to being able to be off with them after school hours and during the summers . . .”
- “The stability of working in a school library appealed to me. The schedule appealed to me. I have a son who just completed second grade so I’m going to be mothering for quite a while . . .”

“The Passion”

Although participants discussed many practical reasons for pursuing school librarianship as a career path, they also identified reasons related to the satisfaction and personal rewards they expected from their work as SLMSs:

- “I was looking for something new and challenging and something that I would really love and enjoy and be passionate about.”
- “I really like it when a child comes either for a pleasure book or to find something on the Internet or whatever. They have a request and I am able to help them find what they are looking for. It’s the greatest experience.”
- “I just remember going to the library and someone always being nice there, and I thought that if every person had a good librarian that they would have this love for books that I didn’t develop, unfortunately, early enough.”

And, some statements from respondents while focusing on the “practical,” also had embedded references to “passion” and choosing a career that offers something more personally rewarding.:

- “I agree with what everyone says about the flexibility because it works for me but at some point you have to have a passion for it and you’ve got to want to do it and you have to have a love for people or children or books or something, to do it.”
- “My husband and I were getting ready to start a family. The kind of job that I have is one that requires me to work a lot of evening and weekend hours and my husband . . . works a lot of weekend and evening hours, so I figured that if I was going to make a career change which I knew I always was. And, so I was motivated by a desire to . . . the feeling of approaching my 30s and I knew that it was time to make a commitment to a career path. And, I knew that my passion was in education and I was trying to find that position for me within education that I thought would be the best match for my gifts and skills.”

Recruiting School Librarians

Employer Perspectives

As part of a larger project to explore employer perceptions of SLMS competencies and performance, members of three employer groups were asked about their strategies for filling SLMS vacancies. District level supervisors of school library media programs, human resource directors, and head principals, were asked to indicate what strategies they used from a list of typical methods for recruiting educators. Participants were asked to check all methods that they use to recruit SLMSs to their districts and schools. The three top methods for all three groups were (1) using school district application files, (2) posting the vacancy on the school district's Web site, and (3) using the online applications on file at the state's Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement. Applicants can submit one application that is available to all school districts at this Web site. District supervisors were more likely to contact the SCDOE and USC-SLIS than were human resource directors or principals. Table 2 summarizes responses from all three employer groups.

In a follow-up question, respondents were asked to explain "other" strategies they used. Of the twenty-three principals who answered this question, eleven reported that they contacted either the district library media supervi-

Table 2
Methods by Employers Used to fill SLMS positions
[N=number who submitted useable surveys].

When you have an opening for a school library media specialist in your district, what do you do to try to fill the position? Check all that apply.	District Supervisors N=27	Human Resource Directors N=34	Principals N=189
Check to see if there are applications on file at the district office	25 (92.6%)	32 (94.12%)	175 (92.59%)
Check to see if there are applications on file at the South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement	20 (74.07%)	33 (97.06%)	76 (40.21%)
Post information about the vacancy on the district Web site	24 (88.89%)	33 (97.06%)	146 (77.25%)
Post a message on the South Carolina Association of School Librarians (SCASL) listserv	12 (44.44%)	7 (20.59%)	31 (16.4%)
Place an ad in the local newspaper	17 (62.96%)	25 (73.53%)	68 (35.98%)
Contact the USC School of Library and Information Science	8 (29.63%)	22 (64.71%)	27 (14.27%)
Contact the SC Department of Education	7 (25.93%)	2 (5.88%)	17 (9%)
Other	4 (14.82%)	7 (20.59%)	23 (12.17%)

sor or the district's personnel office to handle identification of potential candidates for the job. Others became more personally involved by asking the SLMS or teachers in their school to help identify possible candidates. A few commented that they asked SLMSs in other schools for recommendations. Two specifically used the phrase "word of mouth" to describe their efforts to "get the word out" to a wide audience including teachers, SLMSs, parents, and even personnel at the public library. Human resource directors added a few "other" strategies—attending career fairs and running ads in newspapers outside their local area. They also mentioned the importance of "word of mouth" communication and networking to identify potential candidates for vacant positions. All four "other" comments from district library media supervisors were networking-related strategies including "looking for teachers working in our district who are working on their MLIS degree" and posting information about the vacancy to their local electronic discussion board for SLMSs.

In response to an open-ended question asking respondents for any additional comments they wanted to add regarding recruitment, two mentioned that they were "growing their own" by offering help with tuition for teachers willing to pursue school media certification. A number of human resource directors in school districts experiencing the most severe shortages reported offering incentives such as signing bonuses to teachers in "critical needs" areas including SLMSs. Although 95% of school principals reported that their current SLMS was fully credentialed, twenty-two expressed concern about upcoming vacancies and the dearth of candidates for those jobs.

Non-Teacher Perspectives on Recruiting

Classroom teachers come in touch with SLMSs as part of their work in K–12 schools and such exposure was mentioned several times by teachers turned SLMS who responded to the survey. Whether their experience with the SLMS in the school where they worked as a classroom teacher had been positive or not, this is how most come to find out about the job as a career option. But, what about those without classroom teaching experience? Based on their experience, what are their suggestions for recruiting individuals who are not classroom teachers? Comments from focus group participants concentrated on three areas: (1) improving image and awareness, (2) targeting undergraduates, and (3) targeting secondary school students.

The negative stereotype of librarians was mentioned as something that should be addressed by the profession. One participant explained that there is a need "to clear up the misconceptions of what librarians do" and suggested a "re-imaging" of SLMSs in order to overcome stereotypes. Another who has a background in public relations remarked that "people don't think about it because they don't know about it" and described a public relations campaign that might include working with television markets and the state's major daily newspapers to disseminate information about the job.

Others suggested closer contact with undergraduate advisors at the

state's institutions of higher education. One participant described the usual "career fair" event as "standing behind the table" and instead suggested making classroom presentations at targeted universities. Others brainstormed ideas for making secondary school students more aware of the profession by participating in the state's Teacher Cadet program for high school students interested in teaching careers, working with high school guidance counselors, and making an effort to interest secondary school students who volunteer in public libraries during the summer. Within the context of all of their suggestions, they emphasized the importance of "one-to-one contacts."

Discussion

The purpose of this project was to explore reasons why SLMSs choose school librarianship as a career path and how employers recruit SLMSs to their schools and school districts. Given the expected shortage of SLMSs due to retirements among the baby boomer generation, insights into career decisions and recruitment strategies may help professional associations, employers, and LIS programs target their recruitment efforts.

About three-quarters of the respondents to the program completer survey were K-12 teachers before preparing for work as a SLMS and one-fourth came from outside the ranks of classroom teachers. With the exception of two respondents, those new to education described their attraction to the field in positive ways. On the other hand, several former teachers wrote that they were looking for a way out of the classroom but wanted to stay in education. Both groups identified practical concerns as important to them: a schedule that matched that of children or a spouse and the "critical needs" status of SLMSs (and therefore the presumption that job prospects would be plentiful and funds available for tuition reimbursement from the South Carolina Teacher Loan Program). Interest in books, reading, and children's literature were also mentioned by several individuals from both groups. Personal contacts were important to individuals from both groups but more so for those without classroom teaching experience. Results from both the program completer survey and focus group interviews reveal the important influence of librarians on participants' decision to pursue school librarianship as a career path. Focus group participants also pointed out that the image of the SLMS needs updating and that there is misunderstanding about what the job entails.

Most individuals from employer groups (school district media coordinators, district human resource directors, and principals) rely most heavily on state or district employment applications for filling SLMS vacancies. Fewer place ads in newspapers or make contacts outside their schools or school districts in order to identify potential candidates. Among human resource directors, 35.6% of survey respondents reported using the USC-SLIS placement service when looking for SLMS job candidates. Almost 30% of district supervisors reported that they contact USC-SLIS in

looking for job candidates but only 14% of principals reported using this service. Only two employer respondents mentioned planning ahead for job vacancies by offering tuition reimbursement programs for classroom teachers interested in seeking school media certification.

Implications

There has been a longstanding debate in the profession over whether or not a SLMS should be required to have experience as a classroom teacher. Although classroom teaching experience may be preferred by preparation programs and employers, it is not required to qualify for school media certification in many states. According to the most recent *School Library Journal* report on certification standards, only a few states require classroom teaching experience.¹⁰ Both Massachusetts and Colorado, states that once required classroom experience, have revised their policies in light of the shortage of SLMSs.¹¹ Although 22 of the states that responded to the 2006 *School Library Journal* survey reported that licensure as a classroom teacher was a requirement for SLM certification, just as many do not have such a requirement. This means that school librarianship is an option for students just completing undergraduate degrees or for individuals looking for a second or third career. In this study about three-fourths of program completer respondents had classroom teaching experience and one-fourth did not. This is the same proportion of teachers/non-teachers among current students seeking school media certification in USC's program. Most of the non-teachers are women looking for second careers and interested in a work schedule that matches that of family members. With an increasing number of SLMS retirements, some states may not be able to fill those vacancies with classroom teachers alone and may need to recruit some LIS graduates without classroom teaching experience. Preparing these individuals for work as educators in the K-12 environment is a challenge LIS programs will continue to face.

Even in those states that do not require classroom teaching experience, the majority of students preparing for work as a SLMS come from the ranks of classroom teachers. Teachers whose salaries reflect their years of experience and who are vested in retirement systems may see an advantage to staying in education rather than pursuing work in another library environment. A critical issue is the nature of classroom teachers who leave the classroom for the library media center. A matter of concern might be the number of classroom teachers who are pursuing school librarianship in order "to get out of the classroom." In their survey of SLMSs in 2002, the AASL Task Force on Recruitment for the Profession found that "leaving the classroom" was a strong incentive for becoming a SLMS.¹² "How," as Dianne Hopkins asks in the background paper she wrote for Congress on Professional Education in 1999, "can master classroom teachers be attracted to the profession?"¹³ In writing about her employees' experiences with library education, May observed that "a good library school education

requires a combination of good teachers and good students" who are "bright, motivated, and involved."¹⁴ Tilley and Callison call for encouraging "visionary advocates with an understanding of how the school library media program can be a vital part of a K-12 educational program."¹⁵ Much has been written about the importance of SLMSs playing a leadership role in their schools.¹⁶ Identifying prospective SLMSs with the leadership potential needed to develop strong library media programs is a challenge for those responsible for recruitment, whether from the LIS program perspective or from the employer's point of view.

The "image" of the SLMS was identified by this study's focus group participants as an area they believe requires attention. The "image problem" is not new to the profession. Efforts by the American Library Association over the past few years have addressed the problem. One of the purposes of the ALA/AASL "@ Your School Library" public relations campaign is to position school librarianship as an attractive career opportunity.¹⁷ Likewise, ALA's LibraryCareers.org Web site is devoted to highlighting librarianship as a dynamic career choice.¹⁸ Matarazzo and Mika claim that the "negative professional image" of librarians is one reason why more individuals do not enter the field. They recommend that library professionals serve as enthusiastic spokespersons for a "vibrant, interesting, exciting profession" in order to attract new recruits.¹⁹ Results from a number of studies, including this one, confirm the effectiveness that individual librarians have on the career choice of others.²⁰ Personal contacts were described by survey respondents and focus group participants as reasons for choosing school librarianship as a career path. In his February 2002 "President's Message" in *American Libraries*, John W. Berry called on every librarian "to be an ambassador for the profession and recruit at least two new librarians a year."²¹ Van Fleet and Wallace agree that personal contact is important but contend that LIS programs do not play a critical role in recruiting for the profession because their applicants have already made their career decisions.²² Berry, however, makes the point that library schools may need to get more involved in recruitment if the profession is looking for "new blood" and "younger librarians" because the best source may be the undergraduate population to which LIS programs have ready access.²³

School library employers (district level supervisory staff, human resource directors, and school principals) in South Carolina who participated in this study are using their district resources and the state-sponsored Web site that hosts applications for all teacher positions in the state as their main sources for identifying candidates for SLMS jobs. A few gave examples of "thinking outside the box" and making personal contacts within informal networks of associates in order to identify candidates. It is encouraging that almost 65% of human resource directors responding to the survey reported using USC-SLIS placement services when faced with a SLMS opening but only 30% of district supervisors and 14% of principals took advantage of this service. It may be that most employers of SLMSs are not familiar enough with the field to know all of the possible places to turn when trying

to fill these positions. Members of these groups also failed to mention any long-term plans for anticipated vacancies with the exception of two who said their districts offered tuition reimbursement for classroom teachers willing to become certified in a "critical needs" area.

Recommendations

Based on the results of our surveys and focus group interviews together with information found in the professional literature, the following are recommendations for recruiting the next generation of SLMSs. They are based on the premise that the responsibility for recruitment lies with several stakeholder groups including professional associations, individual information professionals, LIS programs, and employers.

- Recruit the "best and brightest" teachers and undergraduates.

LIS programs, professional associations, individual SLMSs, and employers all have roles in recruiting the "best and brightest" teachers to careers in school librarianship. Leadership has been identified as an attribute needed by today's SLMS. Those with the potential for leadership and the skills to act as change agents in their schools are the individuals we need to identify and recruit to the profession. Representatives from the ranks of SLMSs and from LIS programs might consider combining forces for presentations at teacher conferences and open houses. LIS programs have an undergraduate student population on their campuses which would be a good place to begin. LIS programs with the help of professional association members or library cooperatives could work with college and university career centers and undergraduate advisors to ensure that librarianship as a career path is promoted. Information about financial aid available through professional organizations such as the ALA Spectrum Scholarship program developed to encourage a more diverse work force should also be featured in materials available to teachers and undergraduates.

- Be alert to those reentering the work force or seeking a career change.

Bosseau and Martin describe librarianship as an "accidental profession . . . populated overwhelmingly by people who discovered it while detouring from some other planned career."²⁴ With only a few exceptions, the non-teacher participants in this study were inspired by a librarian to pursue school librarianship as a career path. Some volunteered in the library at their child's school. Others had some positive contact with a SLMS or a preservice school librarian.

- Invest in the future by starting early: target secondary school students.

Given the fact that librarianship is usually a second or third career, it is not surprising that only a few participants in this study reported having de-

cided on school librarianship as a possible career path while in still in high school. Bosseau and Martin point out that middle school is an opportune time to expose students to the possibilities of the profession.²⁵ Among the recruitment materials developed by state professional organizations, libraries, and universities are some that target teenagers.²⁶ Local efforts to involve teenagers in school library programs might use these materials as part of career awareness activities in secondary schools.

- Invest in the future by educating employers: target school principals.

Assisting school administrators to develop a greater appreciation of the job of the SLMS and the potential impact of the library media program on student achievement may result in their playing a more active role in planning ahead for anticipated SLMS vacancies. They may also develop an interest in recruiting the "best and brightest" for openings in their schools. This might be accomplished by SLMS presentations at administrators' professional conferences and administrator preparation programs at colleges and universities.

- Challenge negative stereotypes and promote rewards associated with the job.

The success of any recruitment effort will, in part, depend on turning around the negative stereotypes of librarians in general and SLMSs in particular. Over the past several years the ALA has worked with each of its divisions to develop public relations plans to promote a more positive image of libraries and librarians through its @ Your Library public relations campaign. The Institute for Museum and Library Service has also funded projects that have made recruitment materials available that promote librarianship as an attractive career path.²⁷ Focusing on aspects of the job identified by working SLMSs might help to put a positive spin on the image and activities associated with school librarianship. For example, participants in the study reported here found the variety of the job and the opportunity to work with both children and adults as positive aspects of the profession.

There should be some useful information available when the results of the Institute for Museum and Library Services supported project "A National Study on the Future of Librarians in the Workforce" are reported.²⁸ Two of the issues being addressed in that project that are germane to the study reported here are related to recruitment and leadership. Still, an important bottom line is that most studies on recruitment reveal the positive impact of individual librarians. SLMSs positive day-to-day interaction with students, teachers, administrators, and others with whom they come into contact is an important contribution to the overall effort to attract a cadre of highly motivated and dynamic individuals to the profession.²⁹

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